

SHAKESPEARE, 'SHERLOCK'

Basil Rathbone Dies After 56-Year Career

BY ART BERMAN
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Actor Basil Rathbone, whose roles ranged from Shakespeare to Sherlock Holmes, died of a heart attack Friday in New York. He was 75.

Mr. Rathbone's career spanned 56 years, two continents and all theatrical mediums, but his greatest fame came from his motion picture portrayals of the fictional British detective, Holmes.

He made 16 Sherlock Holmes films between 1939 and 1946, and is widely remembered as the tall, dignified sleuth who wore a deerstalker cap, puffed a curved pipe and solved mysteries with a casual:

"Elementary, my dear Watson."

Mr. Rathbone reportedly refused lucrative offers to re-create the Holmes role after the 1953 death of his friend and co-star Nigel Bruce, whom he considered the "only man who could play Dr. Watson."

It was a feeling that he was overly identified with the Holmes' role that drove Mr. Rathbone from Hollywood in the late 1940s.

'Lost Our Identity'

"I was so badly typed," he once said, "that when I went back to New York I lost my own identity. On the street no one ever said 'Good morning, Basil,' or 'Good morning, Mr. Rathbone.'"

"They said 'Good morning, Sherlock.'"

Mr. Rathbone settled in New York, where he performed on Broadway in "The Heiress," "The Winslow Boy" and other productions.

He also played radio and television roles, wrote a book of reminiscences and toured in a one-man show.

He appeared in the Beverly Hills High School Auditorium in March and was acclaimed for his performance, a combination of anecdotes, poetry and readings from Shakespeare.

Mr. Rathbone's death Friday came shortly after he suffered a heart attack



Basil Rathbone

in his New York apartment, according to his daughter, Cynthia.

Funeral services were tentatively scheduled for Tuesday in St. James Episcopal Church in Manhattan.

Mr. Rathbone was born Philip St. John Basil Rathbone on June 13, 1892, in Johannesburg, South Africa, the son of a British engineer. His mother was a descendant of King Henry IV.

Educated in England, Mr. Rathbone joined a cousin's theatrical company in 1911.

Mr. Rathbone's early acting career was largely in Shakespearean productions, some at the Stratford-on-Avon Festival. He also toured the United States in Shakespearean roles.

In 1925, the suave British actor made his first film — a silent, "The Masked Bride," at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Among his other films were "David Copperfield," "Anna Karenina," "Romeo and Juliet" and "Tale of Two Cities."

Mr. Rathbone had a son, Rodion, by his marriage to Marion Foreman, which ended in divorce. In 1926, he married Ouida Bergere, a scenario writer, who survives. They were the parents of Cynthia.